

Director's Message

December 20, 2009 - January 18, 2010

A recent Photovoltaics Online article, Solar Cell Demand to Overtake 2009 Overcapacity, states that solar PV is still dependent on incentives. Just how long will incentives be needed? Time is the variable as the answer will depend on the rate of increased productivity more than on efficiency increases. So, for the present, we must do what we can to provide the incentives for the large up-front investments needed to increase the demand for solar PV products. We have been hearing that the price of solar will be reaching a payback of investment in 5 years or less without incentives. When that happens, you will be able to go to Walmart, Home Depot or Lowes and buy your solar systems and either install them yourself, or have a tradesman install it for you. The chances are that there still will be a feed-in tariff. So the homeowner has the 'power' to produce electricity off his roof areas or from solar mounts on the landscape.

With solar we are at the point where we are with hybrid cars. The hybrid cars are a bit more expensive, but the mileage is great compared with the standard automobile. Is the price worth it? Maybe. It depends on what is important to you. Some of us are motivated by the newness of the technology; having a car that draws attention; some of us are motivated by the idea that we are saving the environment and that is good enough for them to pay the extra amount; others are expecting the price of standard fuels to begin climbing as gas is an ever-decreasing resource. The same is true with solar. Just how expensive is solar for your home today? Here in Tennessee the state offers no solar incentives for the homeowner, but the price of electricity is relatively low compared to the more industrialized and heavily populated states. TVA offers the feed-in tariff which can offset the cost of the installation in from 5 to 10 years depending on what you want in your system. Is today the day to purchase solar? Again, the decision is based on your personal motivation for why you would consider solar for your home; the same motivation that is used in deciding on your next car. Businesses have the advantage in Tennessee as the state does offer an offset to the cost of installing solar. The Federal government is offering billions in tax credits and other incentives but these incentives really do not reach down to the average homeowner. Nor can one can predict just how long any of the incentives will be available.

Will the cost of solar come down? Yes, but the question is when and how much. You, the homeowner, or business person, must decide."